

ESCOP Science & Technology: <http://escop.info/committee/scitech/>

3/23/2020

4 pm ET, via Zoom (<https://zoom.us/j/7318779678> or 1 669 900 9128 Meeting ID: 731 877 9678)

Committee Members:

<p>Chair: Jody Jellison (NERA) Past Chair: Laura Lavine (WAAESD)</p> <p>Delegates: Alton Thompson (ARD) John Yang (ARD) Joe Colletti (NCRA) <i>Bill Barker</i> (NCRA) Indrajeet Chaubey (NERA) <i>Mark Hutton</i> (NERA) <i>Susan Duncan</i> (SAAESD) <i>Nathan McKinney</i> (SAAESD) <i>Gene Kelly</i> (WAAESD) <i>Chris Davies</i> (WAAESD)</p> <p>Executive Vice Chair: <i>Bret Hess</i> (WAAESD ED) <i>Saige Zespy</i> (WAAESD Recorder)</p>	<p>Liaisons: Wendy Powers (ECOP) <i>Daneshia Carley</i> (NIPMCC) Kristina Hains & <i>Tim Killian</i> (SSCC) Parag Chitnis and/or <i>Tim Conner</i> (NIFA) <i>Robert Matteri</i> (USDA ARS)</p>
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Attendees:

Bill Barker, Daneshia Carley, Timothy Conner, Chris Davies, Susan Duncan, Mark Hutton, Jody Jellison, Gene Kelly, Tim Killian, Robert Matteri, Nathan McKinney, Richard Rhodes, Bret Hess (WAAESD ED) and Saige Zespy (WAAESD Recorder)

Agenda & Minutes:

1. Welcome and roll call – Jellison
 - a. Thanks for joining the call, particularly in light of the stressful times.
 - b. Attendees are listed above.
2. Approval of meeting notes from 02/24/2020 – Jellison
 - a. Tim Conner noticed one area where the minutes needed to be amended. NIFA was staffed at 25% as of the February 24 meeting, not 75%. The change will be made in the minutes.
 - b. A motion to approve the minute was made by Mark Hutton and seconded by Chris Davies. The motion passed.
3. Dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic – Jellison
 - a. Possible topics
 1. What is happening at your institution/state?
 2. How are you defining essential/mission-critical personnel and research?
 - A. Jody noted it is difficult to determine the difference between essential and non-essential personnel and research. Bill Barker has authorized staff to continue to provide care for organisms (tissue culture, plants and animals). A research approval process has also been put into place

to determine what is vital, essential and critical research. Until the process is completed, individuals are allowed to keep their biological materials alive.

- B. Jody asked whether a prioritization process for what is most important had been put in place, suggesting, for example that animals rank above plants, etc., but asked whether anyone had a set of written guidelines. Bret noted the North Central Region attached an article with some guidelines on prioritization.
 - 1. Bill Barker suggested caring for organisms based on their uniqueness. For example, a plant strain that has been under development for 10 years would be more important than a "garden variety" plant. He added that uniqueness is also a consideration when looking at teaching versus research projects.
 - 1. At this point, many research farms have gone into summer operation mode, which has been helpful, though may not be sustainable long-term.
 - 2. Several universities have also begun to sell livestock.
 - 2. Jody indicated California has also provided some guidelines.
 - 3. Jody further noted that each department tends to believe their priorities outrank other departments in the colleges.
- 3. How is information being communicated?
 - A. Jody also asked who makes the decisions. Bill noted he is the lead, working with department chairs to determine what work is essential.
 - 1. Danesha noted supervisors at NC State are responsible for assigning mandatory employees and tracking their remote work.
 - 2. Nathan noted that his institution tried to establish a set of guidelines, but for every rule, there was an exception. The result was that all decisions were pushed to the unit and departmental level.
 - 3. Many state governments have defined essential versus non-essential, but it has largely been un-helpful.
 - B. Bill also noted there are increasing travel restrictions which are state mandated. He is preparing his staff members to plan against large trials across large tracts of lands. He is encouraging staff members to make contingency plans.
- 4. What could ESCOP STC be doing during this time?
 - A. Because of the constant change experienced currently, it is difficult to be strategic. Rather, everyone has been pushed into a responsive mode.
 - B. Bill asked about the possibility of supplements from NIFA to support graduate students and other pieces impacted by mandated closures. An earlier call he was on suggested the possibility of a letter to Dr. Angle.
 - 1. Jody further asked whether capacity funds could be extended an additional year, since they are largely spent during summer field work seasons that may or may not happen this year. Tim explained that one-year funds expire September 30, and NIFA doesn't have the authority to extend such funds. He said he

would express to Parag Chitnis the challenge of not being able to spend funds because of mandated shut-downs.

2. Bret added that NIFA has discouraged returning funds to the Treasury, but Jody also noted it would be unwise to rampantly spend funds without a strategy or plan in place.
3. Bret asked if funding extensions could be handled through an OMB rule, rather than Congressional action. Tim noted the action would require legislative action.

4. Liaison Updates, as needed

a. ARS

1. Robert Matteri noted that COVID-19 is impacting ARS across the country. However, each laboratory is different based on location. Some labs are in full closure, while other are not. Those in full closure are operating the same way as when in government shut-down, with the goal of protecting life and property, including experimental materials and animals.
2. Bob further noted that in some cases, research property is also included, but only for projects that would result in a significant loss if they weren't completed now.
3. Guidance for ARS comes from the department level, so they are working one-on-one with laboratory leaders to determine who is essential versus non-essential staff.
4. ARS has maximized its tele-work status, so everyone who can work from home is.
 - A. Jody asked what employees who cannot tele-commute are doing. Bob noted those who cannot work from home who are non-essential are on administrative leave.
 - B. Jody further asked whether federal capacity fund be used to fund administrative leave, noting she did not think it could.. Tim Conner affirmed that federal capacity funds cannot pay for administrative leave, and suggested maybe OMB needed to make a change to this policy in light of the COVID pandemic. Jody further asked for clarification on the policy that administrative leave cannot happen past 80 hours, to this point, which was affirmed by Tim.
5. Despite closure of laboratories, business at ARS is continuing. Their remote infrastructure is working effectively, and while much can't be done off-site, the work that can be accomplished is continuing. The main focus of work is COVID coordination, policy, guidance, and working with lab leaders.
6. As summer approaches, Bob also noted that ARS typically hires a number of students, but that will likely not happen under a lockdown or shelter-in-place policy. They will evaluate student hires as summer draws near, but it is likely that students may not be hired for ARS summer field work. The funds to hire students come from general funds, and they will go to other expenditures. Bob expressed, if summer field work does occur, they may be stuck in a catch-22 circle, but ARS will evaluate as they move forward.

b. ECOP

1. Wendy Powers was unable to make the meeting.
2. Jody commented that communication between ECOP and ESCOP may need to communicate more fully to avoid confusion, particularly in times of shut-down

when employees on the same facility work for both Extension and Experiment Station. Often, they are under different rules, which can be very confusing.

- c. NIFA
 - 1. Tim Conner COVID-19 has hit at a time when NIFA is working to rebuild and re-staff. Currently, onboarding has been slowed down significantly. All of NIFA's staff has been tele-working for two weeks, which may actually help them to catch up. The challenge comes in receiving feedback or answers to questions from universities. Jody noted that some university financial staff members are unable to work from home because of the liability of accessing financial information from home.
 - 2. As of early March, NIFA anticipated the FY19 capacity funds would be released by the end of March or beginning of April, catching up from the backlog. Then, the FY 19 competitive awards that are still in the pipe will be released, hopefully by the end of April.
 - A. Bret asked to clarify that it was the FY 2019 funds that had not yet been released, meaning NIFA is about a year-and-a-half behind. Tim clarified that some of that money was from the last quarter, so NIFA isn't quite 1.5 years behind. These funds must be spent by September 30, after the extra year. Tim said NIFA focused on getting capacity grants out to smaller institutions first, so they have a few larger institutions to get funds to. Those larger institutions have been borrowing from other pots to cover the capacity funds they had not yet received.
 - 3. The FY 2021 Presidential Budget has a slight decrease in capacity funds, but an increase in competitive funds. After Congress completes its work, Tim hopes both bodies will reach a compromise to help in both sets of funding.
 - 4. Jody expressed her appreciation for NIFA at their hard work during this difficult time, as the agency has just moved, is working to re-hire and is catching up from back-logs of work. Bret echoed her comments.
 - d. NIPMCC
 - 1. Danesha had to leave the meeting early, but noted their first conference call is March 24.
 - e. SSSC
 - 1. Tim Killian noted that he didn't have anything to report, but looks forward to continuing to join the group.
 - 2. Bret added that he has been in communication with Travis Park and Bill Hoffman, helping to figure out whether it would be possible to host the SSSC mid-May meeting virtually. The meeting was originally scheduled to be held in DC. The meeting would include an interactive session with NIFA to help get an understanding of how the committee operates, and how the groups can work together.
 - A. Tim noted the timing for that conversation would be perfect, as the agency is working to increase understanding between NIFA and its stakeholders about how to best work together.
5. Status of a one-page, double-side "leave behind" – Hess
- a. Following the last meeting, Bret compiled the suggested changes for the one-pager from the meeting, as well as from emailed suggestions. However, before they were sent off to the communicators, COVID-19 hit, creating an array of issues with the WAAESD Spring Meeting.

- b. Later than anticipated, Bret sent suggestions to communicators. They responded immediately, and Bret and Rick both provided comments. Faith has some ideas to continue to improve the document. The most recent draft is close to completion, and it will be ready at the next meeting.
6. Report discussions – Hess
 - a. No reports were discussed.
7. Other business, as needed
 - a. Next Zoom meeting, April 27 4-5 pm ET
 1. Special Guests:
Paul Wester, Director, National Agricultural Library (NAL)
Dr. Cynthia (Cyndy) Parr, NAL Senior Policy Analyst for Data Management
 - b. Should we review and vote on Excellence in Multistate Research Awards April 27 and cancel the May meeting?
 1. Because the awards are not due until mid-May, it will not be possible to discuss them in April.

Action Items:

- Update minutes to reflect change by Tim Conner (Zespy)
- Provide any written guidance on defining essential and mission-critical personnel and research to the group. (All)
- Continue to work on draft of one-page, double-sided leave behind (Hess)

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